

**Santa Fe Regional Transit Service Plan  
Project Status and Draft Service Evaluation Tools**

**To:** Honorable Members of the Santa Fe Regional Planning Authority

**Through:** Mary Helen Follingstad, AICP, Executive Director, Santa Fe RPA

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**Date:** August 14, 2009

**Agenda Item VII. A: Status Report on Transit Service Plan**

**Summary**

This memo summarizes the project's status, recommends clarifications to transit gross receipts tax (TGRT) funding eligibility, explains draft service evaluation criteria, and discusses final steps to project completion.

**Project Status**

Based on the input and direction provided by the RPA Board at its July 21<sup>st</sup> meeting, we have been assembling and analyzing demographic, land use, travel behavior, and performance measure data, developing draft TGRT-funded service evaluation tools, and coordinating further with tribal entities, particularly San Ildefonso, Santa Clara (ongoing), and Nambe (ongoing).

**Recommended TGRT Funding Eligibility Clarifications**

At its July 21<sup>st</sup> meeting, the RPA Board endorsed the following criteria framework for TGRT funding eligibility:

1. Will the potential service investment provide efficient and cost effective connections to Rail Runner service and regional connections/mobility?
2. Is the potential service "regional" in that it extends and enhances existing transit connections and/ or connects at least two or more modes of transit, or to a designated transfer center such as Santa Fe Place, Rail Runner stations, or downtown?
3. Does the service appear to be technically viable, particularly from a cost efficiency perspective (such as cost per passenger, or cost per vehicle revenue mile)?
4. Correspondence from Councilor Romero requesting recommended service levels and alternative service operators for each specific area studied as well as project performance standards and evaluation criteria as part of the initial service plan and for periodic evaluation over time.

We request clarified direction from the RPA Board regarding the following two issues:

- A. **Existing/recently new service:** Should TGRT funds be used to continue long-term (beyond June 30, 2010) existing transit service that has recently been implemented that otherwise

meets the criteria listed above? Or, should TGRT funds be used only for brand new or expanded service?

- B. **New/expanded service definition:** How broadly should new/expanded service be defined beyond a brand new route? A new geographic component to an existing route serving Rail Runner? Significantly increasing service (headways or hours of service) on an existing route serving Rail Runner?

### Recommendations

Regarding issue A, we recommend that eligibility include existing, recently new service that meets the other eligibility criteria. This would allow the potential continued funding of service by Santa Fe Trails/City, and NCRTD implemented specifically to integrate with Rail Runner, the primary purpose of the TGRT.

Regarding issue B, we recommend that eligibility also include new or expanded service that meets the other eligibility criteria. The purpose of the TGRT is to increase Rail Runner connections and regional mobility – the specific service delivery configuration should not matter as long as these primary objectives are met.

There are a few major implications of these recommendations. The universe of eligible projects – and the pressure on the TGRT to fund them – would increase. Funding any portion of existing service decreases the TGRT’s ability to fund new service. However, not funding existing successful eligible service may lead to loss of valuable service that meets TGRT objectives.

A final major policy consideration: With multiple transit service providers, routes, and service types in the city and county, the over-arching objectives of this transit service plan should be regional integration and coordination to maximize regional personal mobility. As the designated regional transit funding mechanism, the TGRT should have minimal constraints on its flexibility and ability to meet these objectives.

### **Draft Service Evaluation Criteria**

Consistent with the RPA Board’s direction provided at its July 21<sup>st</sup> meeting, we are developing tools to evaluate and prioritize potential regional TGRT-funded service investments. These tools incorporate quantitative and qualitative data and characteristics that correlate to transit-supportiveness.

There are two distinct applications of this analysis, with different objectives, “customer markets,” and service options for each:

- **Rural and outlying areas:** Targets commuters and those who rely on transit as primary or only transportation, especially for vital life functions. Can be significantly expensive to provide service, with low ridership – social equity may supersede cost efficiency. Common service delivery options include park-and-ride, commuter express, demand response, vanpools employer-based transportation demand management, etc.
- **Urban areas:** Targets discretionary ridership – positioning transit as a viable travel choice for personal mobility. Service provision should be coordinated with transit-

supportive land use planning and urban design that emphasize lively, mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods. Service should be frequent, convenient, and direct, and target major destinations. Consists primarily of fixed route service with increasing frequency over time, setting the stage for premium transit service, such as bus rapid transit or light rail transit in the long term.

The recommended commonality among both applications is cost efficiency, such as cost per passenger, passengers per revenue mile, or other similar metrics. While such metrics may vary between urban and rural/outlying service, an equitable allocation of the TGRT as a limited and shared regional resource requires a service efficiency framework.

Finally, as noted in our previous memo, potential ridership is also important, but should not by itself drive service planning decisions. Rather, ridership should be considered in context with service characteristics through the service efficiency metrics discussed above. Forecasting potential ridership for new service is inherently unreliable, particularly for rural/outlying areas.

The attached draft matrix illustrates the methodology and application of the transit-supportive correlation factors for rural/outlying areas. We are preparing a companion matrix for urban areas based on the factors described above. Note that the matrix is an initial draft to illustrate the concepts and methodology, and is undergoing technical review by our project partners.

#### Recommendation

Provide guidance on the draft transit service evaluation and prioritization conceptual framework to guide the development of the service plan.

#### **Final Steps to Project Completion**

Beyond the service evaluation and prioritization steps discussed above, the final transit service plan will contain the following elements:

- Comparing costs and revenues that, along with service evaluations, lead to developing a prioritized list of “cost feasible” service investments.
- Implementation plan describing the recommended phasing/timing of service investments, service delivery options, and recommended service providers.
- Ongoing performance evaluation criteria to annually adjust and refine the service plan. These may include such elements as ridership and cost efficiency trends.
- Policy guidance on regional coordination to implement, periodically assess, and refine the service plan over time.

#### **Conclusions**

Given the complexity of the technical and policy issues at hand, coordination among numerous transit providers and project partners, and the significant number of locally-identified service needs that far exceed anticipated TGRT revenues, we are working comprehensively and efficiently to complete the draft transit service plan. We will present the draft service plan for RPA Board consideration at the September 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting.